

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15
ICA-11 IO-13 AID-05 COME-00 EB-08 FRB-03 TRSE-00
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R 091550Z JUN 78
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4044
INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN
AMEMBASSY LAGOS
AMEMBASSY LOME
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY OUAGADOUGOU

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ACCRA 4733

LONDON FOR SEITZ

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, PINT, PGOV, SHUM, GH
SUBJ: GHANA--POLITICAL CONDITIONS AT MID-YEAR

1. SUMMARY: HEAD OF STATE GEN.I.K. ACHEAMPONG
CURRENTLY HAS AN EXCELLENT CHANCE OF STAYING ON IN
POWER AS PRESIDENT OF THE "UNION GOVERNMENT" SLATED
FOR GHANA IN JULY 1979. HE AND HIS RULING SUPREME
MILITARY COUNCIL (SMC) ARE STILL UNPOPULAR BUT
ECONOMIC PRESSURES ON THEM APPEAR TO BE EASING
MARGINALLY AND OPPONENTS OF THE REGIME HAVE BEEN
INTIMIDATED BY A RASH OF ARRESTS. SOME POLITICAL
PRISONERS HAVE BEEN RELEASED, HOWEVER, AND OTHERS
WILL BE FREED IF REVIEWS OF THEIR CASES INDICATE
THEY WERE NOT PLANNING TO PARALYZE THE COUNTRY BY
ORGANIZING STRIKES AFTER THE DISPUTED MARCH 30
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REFERENDUM. A CONSTITUTIONAL COMMISSION IS AT
WORK BUT HAS AROUSED LITTLE PUBLIC OR MEDIA
INTEREST. IT IS LIKELY TO PRODUCE A CONSTITUTION
BY OCTOBER 1978 WHICH PROVIDES FOR MORE CIVILIAN
PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT BUT LEAVES MOST
POWER IN HANDS OF THE PRESIDENT, MILITARY AND POLICE.
THUS THE OVERALL OUTLOOK IS FOR LITTLE REAL

POLITICAL CHANGE FOR THE COMING YEAR. END SUMMARY.

2. DEMONSTRATING ONCE AGAIN HIS REMARKABLE POWERS OF SURVIVAL AND ABILITY TO OUTMANEUVER HIS OPPONENTS, HEAD OF STATE ACHEAMPONG HAS EMERGED RELATIVELY UNSCATHED FROM THE TURBULENCE OF THE DISPUTED MARCH 30 REFERENDUM OF UNION GOVERNMENT AND ITS ATTENDANT THREATS OF PARALYZING STRIKES. AT MID-YEAR, HE SEEMS RELAXED, FIRMLY IN POWER AND CONFIDENT THAT GHANA WILL CONTINUE TO MOVE ALONG HIS OWN TIMETABLE FOR A RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONAL RULE (UNDER HIS CONCEPT OF UNION GOVERNMENT) BY JULY 1, 1979. HE AND THE RULING SUPREME MILITARY COUNCIL (SMC) ARE STILL UNPOPULAR, MAINLY BECAUSE THEIR MISMANAGEMENT OVER THE LAST SEVERAL YEARS HAS NEARLY DRIVEN THE ECONOMY INTO THE GROUND. AT PRESENT, HOWEVER, WHILE ECONOMIC PROBLEMS CONTINUE TO PLAGUE GHANA, WE HAVE THE IMPRESSION THAT THE RATE OF ECONOMIC DECLINE IS NOW EASING SLIGHTLY. THE TREND IS TILL DOWN BUT THE RATE IS SLOWING. ONE IMPORTANT FACTOR IS THAT FOOD SUPPLIES SEEM TO BE ADEQUATE NOW, THANKS TO BETTER WEATHER AND FOOD AID FROM DONOR COUNTRIES; THE OUTLOOK IS ALSO FOR IMPROVED DOMESTIC FOOD PRODUCTION THIS YEAR. ANOTHER REASON IS THAT GHANAIANS SEEM TO HAVE ACCEPTED HARD TIMES AS A SEMI-PERMANENT CONDITION, TEMPERING THEIR FATALISM

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WITH THE HOPE THAT SOMEHOW CONDITIONS WILL EVENTUALLY IMPROVE. THE UPSHOT IS THAT, IN OUR VIEW, ECONOMIC PROBLEMS HERE WILL NOW EXERT SLIGHTLY LESS PRESSURE ON THE REGIME THAN THEY HAVE IN THE RECENT PAST. IN OTHER WORDS, FOR THE TIME BEING ACHEAMPONG MAY WILL NOT BE FORCED TO MAKE SIGNIFICANT CONCESSIONS TO ECONOMIC REFORM OR TO HIS POLITICAL OPPONENTS. THESE ECONOMIC PROBLEMS WILL, OF COURSE, BE GREATLY EXACERBATED IF AND WHEN COCOA PRICES DECLINE.

3. CRITICS OF THE GOVERNMENT HAVE BEEN INTIMIDATED AND SILENCED (AT LEAST PUBLICLY) BY ARRESTS WHICH BEGAN AFTER THE REFERENDUM. THE SMC ALLEGED THAT DISSIDENTS WERE PLANNING TO KIDNAP GOG OFFICIALS, SABOTAGE THE ECONOMY AND ORGANIZE WIDESPREAD STRIKES. THE REGIME HAS PUT FORTH LITTLE EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT ITS CHARGES, BUT SUCH PROOF IS NOT NEEDED UNDER GHANA'S PREVENTIVE DETENTION LAWS. ESTIMATES OF POLITICAL PRISONERS HELD HERE HAVE RANGED FROM A LOW OF 35 (THE GOVERNMENT'S FIGURE) TO A HIGH OF ABOUT 300 (AN EXAGGERATED OPPOSITION ESTIMATE). WHATEVER THE REAL NUMBERS, THE ARRESTS HAVE SHARPLY

DIMINISHED OPPONENTS' ZEAL FOR STRIKES OR OTHER ANTI-REGIME ACTIVITIES. WITH THIS GOAL ACCOMPLISHED, ACHEAMPONG IS NOW READY TO LET SOME PRISONERS GO. AS REPORTED SEPTEL, HE TOLD AMBASSADOR ON JUNE 6 THAT 8 OF 35 PRISONERS HAVE ALREADY BEEN FREED AND OTHERS WILL BE RELEASED IF ON-GOING REVIEWS OF THEIR CASES INDICATE THAT THEY ARE NOT GUILTY.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 ACCRA 4733

LONDON FOR SEITZ

4. A 27-MEMBER CONSTITUTIONAL COMMISSION IS NOW AT WORK AND HAS INVITED THE PUBLIC TO SEND IN SUGGESTIONS FOR A NEW CONSTITUTION FOR GHANA. INITIAL MEETINGS OF THE COMMISSION HAVE BEEN DEVOTED TO GENERAL DISCUSSIONS OF KEY ISSUES--E.G., ROLE OF THE PROPOSED LEGISLATURE; REPRESENTATION FOR THE PEOPLE, ARMED FORCES AND TRIBAL CHEIFS; THE STRUCTURE AND POWERS OF THE EXECUTIVE; AND THE IMPLICATIONS OF HAVING A "NON-PARTY STATE" (A PARADOX INHERENT IN THE CONCEPT OF UNION GOVERNMENT). THE COMMISSION HAS NOT REACHED ANY VERDICTS ON THESE OR RELATED QUESTIONS, E.G., HOW THE FIRST PRESIDENT WILL BE CHOSEN. SINCE THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION IS NOT DUE UNTIL THE END OF OCTOBER 1978, WE THINK PROGRESS IS LIKELY TO BE DESULTORY

UNTIL THE DEADLINE GETS CLOSER.

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5. MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION APPEAR COMPETENT ENOUGH BUT THEY ARE NOT GHANA'S BEST AND BRIGHTEST LIGHTS. MOST WERE HAND-PICKED BY THE SMC AND SUPPORT ACHEAMPONG AND UNION GOVERNMENT. PERHAPS FOR THIS REASON, THE WORK OF THE COMMISSION HAS THUS FAR EXCITED LITTLE PUBLIC OR MEDIA INTEREST. OUR EXPECTATION IS THAT THE FINAL DRAFT IT PRODUCES WILL PROVIDE FOR SOME DEGREE OF CIVILIAN PARTICIPATION IN THE NEW GOVERNMENT BUT WILL LEAVE POWER FIRMLY IN THE HANDS OF THE PRESIDENT (WHO IS LIKELY TO BE ACHEAMPONG) AND OF THE MILITARY AND POLICE (WHO WILL PROBABLY HAVE IMPORTANT DIRECT AND ADVISORY ROLES IN THE NEW REGIME). THE SMC HAS PROMISED NOT TO INTERVENE IN THE CONSTITUTION-MAKING PROCESS BUT IS SURE TO WATCH IT CAREFULLY TO MAKE SURE THE FINAL DRAFT CONTAINS NO UNPLEASANT SURPRISES. ACHEAMPONG IS UNLIKELY TO LET ANY DRAFT GO FOWARD TO THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY (WHICH HE WILL APPOINT IN NOVEMBER 1978) IF HE THINKS IT WILL ERODE HIS OWN INFLUENCE OR THAT OF THE MILITARY AND POLICE. WE THEREFORE DOUBT ANY FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES WILL EMERGE FROM THIS PROCESS.

6. AT MID-YEAR, THEN, THE OVERALL POLITICAL OUTLOOK FOR THE COUNTRY IS FOR A CONTINUATION OF THE STATUE QUO, AT LEAST UNTIL THE MIDDLE OF NEXT YEAR--BARRING, OF COURSE, SUCH UNTOWARD EVENTS AS ASSASSINATION OR A COUP. (THESE ARE ALWAYS POSSIBLE BUT SEEM UNLIKELY AT PRESENT.) ACHEAMPONG'S OPPONENTS REMAIN INTIMIDATED, WEAK AND DISUNITED. A PRECIPITOUS FALL IN FOREIGN EXCHANGE EARNINGS, WHICH COULD HAPPEN IF COCOA PRICES DECLINE OVER THE NEXT 12 MONTHS, WOULD BRING ACHEAMPONG'S ECONOMIC PROBLEMS TO SUCH A PASS THAT OPPONENTS MIGHT MANAGE TO OUST HIM.

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EXCLUDING A SHARP PRICE FALL, HOWEVER, WE THINK HE WILL CONTINUE TO MUDDLE THROUGH DESPITE THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMIC PROBLEMS. A REAL BLUNDER ON HIS PART (FOR EXAMPLE, INTERVENING TOO HEAVY-HANDEDLY IN THE WORK OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL COMMISSION) MIGHT GIVE HIS CRITICS A NEW LEASE ON LIFE BUT, DEPRIVED OF SUCH AN OPPORTUNITY, THEY WILL PROBABLY SULK IN THEIR TENTS

UNTIL UNION GOVERNMENT IS INAUGURATED IN MID-1979.
BANS OF POLITICAL ACTIVITY WILL THEN PRESUMABLY
BE EASED AND THEY WILL BE ABLE TO SNIPE PUBLICLY
AT THE GOVERNMENT FROM WITHIN THE LEGISLATURE.
BY THAT TIME, HOWEVER, WE EXPECT THAT ACHEAMPONG,
THE MILITARY AND POLICE WILL BE SO FIRMLY ENTRENCHED
IN THE NEW GOVERNMENT THAT DISLODGING WILL PROVE
EXTREMELY DIFFICULT. IN BROADEST TERMS, THEN, THE
POLITICAL OUTLOOK IN GHANA IS FOR MORE OF THE SAME.
SMITH

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